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NEWS RELEASE

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Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced that Shawn A. Hoffman, age 19, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was sentenced today in the United States District Court in Alexandria by Judge Leonie M. Brinkema, to 30 months imprisonment and \$241,409 in restitution. On December 5, 2003, Hoffman pled guilty to one charge of wire fraud.

In December 2002 a resident of Mclean, Virginia, listed a diamond and ruby necklace and matching earrings for sale on eBay for \$20,000.00. On December 15, 2002, the resident was contacted by Hoffman via email. Hoffman proposed the direct sale of the necklace and directed the resident to an escrow service offered through a website called www.safexchange-escrow.com. On December 17, 2002, the resident viewed the escrow service website and registered for an account. The resident later received emails from what appeared to be a legitimate escrow service email account advising her that the escrow service had received the funds from Hoffman and that she was to ship the necklace and earrings to the address provided by Hoffman. On December 17, 2002, the resident sent the jewelry to Hoffman via United Parcel Service (UPS) to a location in Horsham, Pennsylvania.

Hoffman subsequently sold the jewelry through a jeweler in New York City. The resident never received the promised escrow funds of \$19,224.00. The escrow website was in fact controlled by Hoffman. A legitimate escrow website called www.safe-ex.com, located in Singapore, does exist but has no connection to the fraudulent website operated by Hoffman. The two websites appeared virtually identical.

Hoffman admitted to defrauding numerous victims over the Internet since 2001. Items fraudulently obtained by Hoffman included a 6.5 carat diamond ring, 7.2 carat diamond earrings, a 13 carat diamond necklace, Rolex watches and a Sony recorder. In all, Hoffman defrauded numerous victims of \$241,409.

United States Attorney Paul J. McNulty said, "The Internet must remain secure and safe. Today's technology does not shield those who steal from individuals by using the Internet. They are common criminals and will be treated as such."

The investigation was conducted by the FBI's Washington Field Office and the Fairfax County Police Department. Prosecuting this case for the United States was Assistant United

States Attorney Robert W. Wiechering and Trial Attorney Todd Hinnen, Department of Justice,
Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section.